

Islam Is...

An Introduction to Islam & Its Principles

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PREFACE

The purpose of this work is to present the authentic

teachings of Islam. We do not present any specific version or a unique interpretation of Islam. We present Islam as it is, without sugarcoating, and we allow it to stand on its own merits. There is only one Islam and only one example of how it is to be lived — that of the Prophet Muhammad^p (Peace be upon him).¹ Our intention is to provide a basic overview of the main tenets of Islam as given in the Qur'an and as exemplified by the Prophet^p. We also intend to address some of the commonly asked questions about Islam.

Despite the fact that over one-fifth of the world's population is Muslim, Islam is often misunderstood and misrepresented in contemporary Western societies. It is hoped that this work will help shed light on Islam as it was divinely communicated to Muhammad^p and dispel any commonly held misconceptions that perpetuate prejudice and hatred. We write this booklet in the hope that people of all faiths will join us in making this a world of tolerance, kindness, understanding, and peace.

1. WHAT IS ISLAM?

The Arabic word Islam literally means "surrender" or "submission." Islam, as a faith, means total and sincere surrender to God so that one can live in peace and tranquility. Peace (Salam in Arabic, Shalom in Hebrew) is achieved through active obedience to the revealed commandments of God, for God is *The Just, The Peace*. (The italicized words throughout the text indicate either a verse from the Qur'an or one of the names and attributes of God.)

The name Islam² is universal in meaning. Islam is not named after a tribe of people or an individual, as Judaism is named after the tribe of Judah, Christianity after Christ, and Buddhism after Buddha. Islam is not a name chosen by human beings; it was divinely communicated from God. Islam is a global faith, not of the East or the West. Islam is a complete way of life, implying a total submission to God. One who surrenders his or her will to God, voluntarily,³ is called a Muslim. It was not Muhammad^p but Adam^p who first brought Islam to humanity. Then, each Prophet and Messenger^p came to exhort the people to a clear understanding of God's commandments. They offered teachings relevant to that time, until God chose the final Prophet, Muhammad^p, to come with the Last Testament referred to as the Qur'an.

Allah is an Arabic word, meaning "*The One and Only True God*," the proper name of *The One* who created the heavens and the earth. **Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians also call God by the name Allah.** For a Muslim, *Allah* is the greatest and most inclusive of names for God, denoting *The One* who is adored in worship, *The One* who created all that exists.

¹ The symbol (^p) means "Peace and blessing be upon him (or them)." It is an Islamic tradition to offer blessings of peace to all the Prophets and Messengers of God. To respect God's representatives is to respect God.

² Some Muslims are uncomfortable calling Islam a "religion," as Islam is not an institutionalized faith. In Arabic Islam is referred to as a *Deen*, "Way of life." This is the same as early Christians who also called their faith "The Way."

³ "Voluntarily" in this sense means more than "not being coerced." It means surrendering to God without ulterior motives or reservations, and with genuine wholeheartedness.

leader. In Medina, the Islamic community was established, and from there the Prophet Muhammad^p continued his peaceful mission of calling the people to Islam.

The Makkhan alliance was intent on extinguishing Islam, Muhammad^p, and his monotheistic teachings. Several major military campaigns were waged by the Makkhan army to attack Medina in order to annihilate Muslims. When the well-equipped armies of aggressors were forming on the horizon, far outnumbering the Muslims, God *The Wise*, gave Muslims permission for the first time to bear arms in defense of their life and faith in jihad. The pagan armies of Makkah were defeated by Muslims who were far inferior in numbers and equipment though blessed with faith.

After the Makkhan alliance recognized that war was futile, Muslims initiated a nonaggression treaty which was signed between the Makkhan alliance chiefs and the Prophet Muhammad^p. Muslims are required by God to strive toward peace at any opportunity. This treaty allowed unarmed Muslims to perform the pilgrimage to the Ka'bah, built by Abraham^p. This peaceful period proved discouraging to Makkhan leaders who saw Muslim numbers grow rapidly. Masterminding another treacherous plot, the Makkhan alliance attacked and slaughtered many in betrayal of the treaty with the Muslims, in order to put a stop to Islam and peace. It was only after the Makkhan alliance violated the treaty, that the Qur'anic verse ordering Muslims to jihad against this tyranny was revealed. Amazingly the Makkans did not engage in combat. Muhammad^p entered Makkah humbly, and instead of taking revenge, he offered general amnesty and forgiveness to everyone. Muslims **peacefully** conquered Makkah without bloodshed, cleansing the Ka'bah and destroying all the idols. Muhammad^p forbade any oppression, injustice, or compulsion in religion and did not allow any doors to be forced open. He graciously forgave his most bitter enemies, including those who had severely persecuted him and had even killed members of his family. This is Muhammad^p, a true example of Islam, the pinnacle of humanity, and the clear example of jihad.

The following will further clarify how fighting in Islam was conducted. The Prophet Muhammad^p forbade the killing of any noncombatants. Ibn 'Umar, a companion of the Prophet^p said, "I saw the body of a slain woman during one of the battles of the Prophet^p, so he forbade the killing of women and children." [Book of Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Rabah b. Rabi was another companion of the Prophet Muhammad^p. He gave the following account of an incident that occurred during one of the battles: "We were with God's Messenger^p during a battle and we saw people gathered together. He dispatched a man to find out why they were gathered. The man returned and said: 'They are gathered around a slain woman.' So God's Messenger^p said: 'She should not have been attacked!' Khalid b. al-Walid was leading the forces, so he dispatched a man to him saying: 'Tell Khalid not to kill women or laborers [civilians].'" [Book of Sunan Abi Dawud]

God's Messenger^p used to say the following words to his troops before sending them to fight: "Go forward in the name of God. Do not kill an elderly person, nor a child, nor a woman, and do not exceed the bounds." [Book of Muwatta]

From all of this it is easy to see the position of Islam on

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terrorism. Terrorism is against Islamic principles.

Terrorism is a form of warfare in which innocent people are specifically targeted in order to instill fear in a society. It is clear from the preceding that even during war, when the Muslims are defending against an aggressive enemy, they are never allowed to target any civilians, or to destroy crops, trees, or livestock. This is strictly prohibited by Islamic law and the clear examples of the Prophet Muhammad^p. The killing of innocents is murder and a crime against God and humanity, **even during times of war and even when the other side does not similarly respect civilian life**. One who intentionally kills innocent people is a murderer who deserves the punishment for murder. Terrorism is categorically prohibited in Islam and Islamic law rejects the premise that a non-legitimate tactic can ever lead to a positive result.

Throughout Islamic history, the behavior of Muslims who followed the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad^p, as well as how they treated others in times of war, has been exemplary. Abu Bakr, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad^p and the first Caliph (successor and leader) who came after him, sent an army to Syria to fight the aggressive Roman legions and went out to give them words of encouragement. He said: "You are going to find a group of people who have devoted themselves to the worship of God [i.e., monks], so leave them to what they are doing."

When Umar, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad^p and the second Caliph, drove the Roman legions out of Jerusalem, the Muslims were welcomed as liberators. Even though the Muslims had conquered the land, they were not allowed to look upon the inhabitants of the land as their enemies. Their enemies were only the Roman legions who had aggressed against them. When Umar entered Jerusalem as a conqueror, he came humbly. Instead of dictating harsh terms to the people, he brought a treaty that guaranteed the people of Jerusalem, who were predominantly Christian, their safety and freedom from all persecution. The following is from the treaty that he drafted for them:

"This is what Umar, the commander of the faithful, grants to the people in peace. He grants them the safety of their persons, their churches, and their crosses... their churches will not be shut down nor destroyed. Nothing will be taken from them or from their crosses. They will not be compelled to abandon their faith nor shall any one of them be abused."

To reiterate, there is no such thing as a "holy war" in Islam. War is atrocious and can never be holy. Muslims are not allowed to force their religion on anyone. The word jihad means "struggle." This struggle can be of a military nature. When it is, the difference between jihad and war becomes clear. Jihad can never be fought for worldly gain, for conquest, or for revenge. Muslims must fight to protect the freedom of the people to worship God when that freedom is forcibly attacked. They are never allowed to attack innocent people, even when they are themselves attacked.

Any people who go against this established principle of Islamic law are fighting in contradiction to Islamic principles. It is ludicrous for anyone to call this fighting a jihad, a word that means striving for the cause of Islam. In general, they are murderers in the light of Islamic law and should be treated as such.

19. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

One of the hallmarks of Islam is its complete harmony with science. A Muslim considers conflict between scientific facts and religion to be impossible. Religion comes from God, *The First* and *The Last*, and so does the universe that He alone created. It is impossible for one to contradict the other.

A Muslim assumes that a natural explanation can be found for everything in God's creation — from the formation of the stars and galaxies to the origin and diversity of different species. A Muslim should never rely on miracles to explain natural phenomena. A Muslim believes that miracles are instances where God contravenes His own natural laws for a specific reason, such as to assist one of His Prophets or to answer a prayer. Miraculous explanations should never be resorted to in order to explain something in the natural world or to cover up human ignorance on a scientific matter.

There has never been a scientific fact or a valid scientific theory that contradicted the teachings of Islam. Whatever science uncovers, it only increases our knowledge of God's magnificent creation. This is why Islam actively encourages scientific endeavors and why the Qur'an commands us to study God's signs in nature. In fact, the Qur'an has many amazing scientific references, that with the help of today's modern technological advancements, are just recently becoming fully understood.

Islam also allows us to fully enjoy the fruits of human ingenuity. We are encouraged to strive to better the world. Islam welcomes technological advances. Technology can be employed for good or evil. Technology itself is neutral. It is our responsibility to use the knowledge that God has blessed us with for the betterment of all humanity.

In the early days of Islam, when people adhered to its beliefs and principles, there was a flowering of science, culture, trade, and technology. Scholars in the Islamic world researched and advanced the fields of mathematics, chemistry, physics, medicine, astronomy, architecture, art, literature, geography, history, and more. Muslim scientists invented the magnetic compass, the astrolabe, and the clock pendulum, to name a few. Many critical systems such as algebra, the Arabic numerals (which are the same numbers that we currently use), and the very concept of zero (vital to the advancement of mathematics) were introduced to medieval Europe through Muslim scholars. The teachings of Islam brought about this scientific awareness, which eventually ignited and propelled the European Renaissance. It was only after people began deviating from the simple original Islamic principles and beliefs that the advancements and scientific achievements of the Muslim world began to cease and fall into obscurity.

20. FUNDAMENTALISM AND TERRORISM

Fundamentalism comes from the root word *fundare*, which means "a base or foundation." The definition of fundamentalism in reference to religion is "religious beliefs based on a literal interpretation of a religious text."

If you ask a Westerner, "What is the first image that comes to mind when you hear the word 'Muslim'?" many answer, "Terrorist." This may be due to the fact that the word Muslim is often paired with the word "terrorist" in the media.

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If a Jew or Christian were to take part in an act that is clearly considered terrorism, one would not hear that person called a "Christian terrorist" or a "Jewish terrorist." Just as Jim Jones (who claimed to represent Christ) is not considered representative of Christianity, terrorists should not be considered representatives of Islam.

Two phrases often used interchangeably are "Muslim terrorist" and "Muslim fundamentalist." "Muslim terrorist" is an oxymoron; **one who truly practices Islam cannot be a terrorist**. And if we were to refer to the definition of fundamentalism, we would know that these two phrases are mistakenly or intentionally being used interchangeably, and that they actually have opposite meanings. A true Islamic fundamentalist is one who strictly adheres to the fundamentals of Islam, which can only be defined by the Qur'an and the life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad^p. This is the **opposite** of what people commonly call "Islamic fundamentalism." Within true Islamic fundamentalism one would **never** see crimes against humanity, heinous acts of hatred, political killing, terrorism, oppression, religious extremism or zealotry, or the forcing of one's religion on others. All of these acts are clearly forbidden in Islam. Muhammad^p was a pinnacle of humanity's generosity and compassion.

When it comes to the media, the spotlight is shining on dramatic murderers who are repeatedly referred to as "Islamic fundamentalists." This is in total contradiction to the definition of the **truly** practicing Muslim fundamentalists. It is a tragedy that many people have an enormous and unfounded fear of Islam and what is mistakenly thought to be Islam's fundamental beliefs. From the time of the Crusades, there are still some people who have taken an aggressively hostile and demonizing stance toward Islam.

It is distressing when one reads a newspaper article or hears a broadcast report that takes quotations from the Qur'an out of context to create fear or divisiveness.²¹ Misrepresenting or twisting any religious text is despicable, whether it is done by "terrorists" or by "evangelists." Fear mongers who misrepresent religious principles to create alienation, fear, and hatred are another type of terrorist. Terrorism can be physical, emotional, or psychological. At the very least, it is the duty of all people who wish to counter any kind of terrorism to become informed about one another's true beliefs. Unfortunately, polarizing propaganda has been relentlessly spun into the sensationalism of today's media, unjustly fueled by the fear of this "unknown and strange" faith. Today's mass media, which is controlled by few, appears to be the most researched, refined, and powerful mind-control instrument ever devised by man to shape "world opinion." Alienation is escalating. It often seems that all governments need enemies to fuel the military and to bring about "national unity." During the Cold War, "the enemy" was "Communism." Today, Muslims globally often

²¹ In Matthew 10:34, Jesus^s is quoted as saying, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword." This illustrates the danger of taking a quotation out of context without understanding the broader, noble, and beautiful message of Jesus^s. Those who wish to defame any religion by cutting, pasting, and twisting any religious texts, sadly, may achieve their evil purpose.

find themselves in the cross hairs, cast as “the enemy.”

Unfortunately, across the globe those Muslims who are practicing true Islamic principles are becoming an “endangered species.” As Muslims struggle to practice their beliefs many are challenged, not only by their own government or Western governments, but they also find themselves caught between secularists and narrow-minded extremists. The subjective corporate media spotlight is not shining on the **true** Islamic fundamentalists.

Pressure Cooker: Today there are millions of people living under great oppression. Their future looks hopeless as their families and homes are being crushed by humiliating injustice and violence. When such conditions are ignored or viewed with callous indifference by the rest of the world, it can and does produce a desperate rage that transcends all culture and religion. These are the conditions in which many Muslims find themselves today. Lacking hope and having lost patience with the dysfunctional options placed before them, they seek relief or justice in desperation. Thus we are seeing more and more of them willing to take extreme measures, willing to react in violent ways, even to kill themselves, in order to deliver a militant or political act of defiance. Committing suicide and killing civilians are both forbidden in Islam. Those living in the Muslim world who are in this “pressure cooker” of oppression may seek any nonreligious or religious justification for their desperate, violent, and extreme actions. If they look long enough, they sometimes find what they are looking for, as there are people of an extreme mindset in every religion who do not truly practice and represent the actual tenets of their faith.

21. SUMMARY

Islam is... a religion of justice, peace, mercy, and forgiveness, a faith which is often misunderstood and misrepresented. **Islam means to surrender one's will to God, The Peace.** Islam is the way of life for anyone who chooses to accept that **there is one God only, and none is worthy of worship but Him.** This world is temporary and no more than a trial for humanity, after which we will all die and return to God, *The Taker*. The life of the Hereafter is forever. God, *The Light*, for the guidance of the children of Adam^p, sent us Prophets: Abraham^p, Moses^p, Jesus^p, Muhammad^p, all Prophets of Islam. God chose Muhammad^p as His final Prophet and Messenger and honored him with the privilege of revealing the Qur'an through him. The Qur'an is the direct unalterable word of God, not the word of Muhammad^p, who was an unlettered man. God has preserved the Qur'an with its teachings for all of humanity.

The five fundamental acts of worship for Muslims are as follows:

1. To “testify that there is no deity except God, and that Muhammad is His Messenger”
2. To **pray** five times a day
3. To pay the yearly **alms**
4. To **fast** during Ramadan
5. To make the **pilgrimage** to Makkah.

It is imperative to understand jihad. Jihad is a struggle for the cause of God alone and cannot violate Islamic principles. Terrorism is clearly rejected by Islam and can never be called jihad. God states that there is no compulsion in religion.

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Human rights and freedom of choice are sacred. In Islam, women play a very important role. Women are equal to and required to be honored by men.

God mentions in the Qur'an that He has perfected Islam as a religion for all of humanity, thus completing His favor upon us. God has prepared for us the light of Islam as a guide for humanity's return to Him.

22. EDITOR'S NOTE

We are told by scientists that space contains over 120 billion galaxies. We know that every one of us was created by God *The Most Magnificent*, from a single cell. When I think about this, I can't help but be humbled and realize my extreme insignificance in the light of God's amazing splendor. Satan swore to deceive humanity, to bring us misunderstanding, animosity, hatred, and war. To do my part in opposing Satan, my motives are to please my Lord by promoting peace through understanding.

Life is short and precious; it is tragic to waste it by piling up temporal material gain while ignoring the true purpose of creation: **to worship God alone.** Many people spend their precious lives accumulating temporal material wealth. Through Islam, God invites us to turn to that which is everlasting, eternal. On the Day of Judgment, we will be accountable for what we knew and how we had applied it. We will be asked about our worship. Now is the time for us to prepare for the answer.

This book is based on the lectures I have been giving on Islam for the past two decades. It would not have been possible without God's mercy and the help and assistance of my brothers and sisters. I thank you, my readers, for your time and interest in understanding Islam, the faith of one-fifth of the world's population. For additional information on Islam you can contact us by visiting www.islam-is.com. We also welcome your questions as well as your comments and feedback for consideration in this ongoing work. I invite you to share any or all of this material. I ask only that you do not quote this information out of context.

Please forgive me if in this work I have offended anyone. Because of my passion for Islam, I express my faith strongly. I greatly value individual choice and respect differences. **Understanding and justice are the way to peace,** and because Islam is often perceived in the West as a religion of narrow-minded zealots out to convert the world by force, I feel it is vital that I convey my faith in clear and unambiguous language to counter misconceptions.

May God bless us all with guidance. Any good that comes from this work is by God's benevolence, and if I have said anything unhelpful, it is my shortcoming. God, *The Exalted* and *The Loving*, is perfect.

“Oh, *The All Hearing*, protect us from all evil and guide us to the truth.”

Peace be upon you,

Pete Seda

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